

**Opening Statement of Chairman Greg Walden**  
**Subcommittee on Communications and Technology**  
**Hearing on “Defining and Mapping Broadband in America”**  
**June 21, 2017**

*(As prepared for delivery)*

If you ask someone in rural America – like my district in Oregon – whether they have broadband access that meets the speeds ‘as defined by the Federal Communications Commission,’ they probably don’t know. But if you ask them whether they get internet access to match their needs, they can probably give you a quick “yes” or “no” answer.

That should be our primary objective as policy makers looking to allocate federal resources—accounting for consumer demand, and getting the most people access to a productive level of internet service. People in the most remote parts of Oregon and other unserved parts of our country probably would tell you they’d be happy with just about any level of high-speed internet service, they just want to be connected. While we want to be sure that everyone can participate in the modern digital economy, we should also make sure that any definition of broadband is driven by what an average consumer needs, not just an arbitrary standard.

I think we all agree that there are places in our country where private investment would never go, but in order to identify those places, we must take the time to properly study where an infusion of infrastructure funding will be most effective. As we continue our discussions around broadband infrastructure, we must ensure we are prepared to offer effective solutions with the precious federal dollars that may be available, and that means starting with reliable data to identify those Americans that are most in need. Without the best data available, we will continue to leave rural areas behind. What we’ve unfortunately seen over the years of debate on how to deliver fast, reliable internet access to all Americans, is that the folks that need it most often get lost in the rush to dole out government funds. All we have at the end of such exercises is failed government intervention in the marketplace. If earlier efforts had been successful we wouldn’t be having this conversation today.

We learned this lesson the hard way from our experience with the Rural Utilities Service and the 2009 Recovery Act. As outlined by an investigator with the non-partisan Government Accountability Office, “we are left with a program that spent \$3 billion and we really don’t know what became of it.” This time around, we must remember what happened when policy makers didn’t take the time necessary to identify parts of the country that needed funds the most.

During the debate around the funding in 2009, I pushed for an amendment that would require mapping before funding—and while my amendment was unfortunately not adopted then, I stand by this principle. If we intend to invest taxpayer dollars, we should target those resources carefully and thoughtfully. We owe nothing less to the hardworking people of this country.

Let's do it right this time. Let's not repeat mistakes of the past, let's get the data, let's use the data, and target those places that need help the most. Let's connect rural America to new economic opportunities and increase the quality of life in these communities.